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Race and Ethnicity in Contemporary American Politics
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Key Words

Minority group, discrimination, immigration, integration

Summary

Minority groups such as Native Americans and Asian Americans have had a long history of struggles with the United States government. Both groups have had to overcome issues of integration with the American society and discrimination from the government and the American people.

Key Points

1. Minority groups such as Native Americans and Asian Americans have faced conflicts with the U.S. government.
2. These groups faced discrimination and barred social integration.
3. Hostilities against individuals of these minority groups from Americans were partially due to the
4. The Civil Rights movement and other key legislative acts proved essential in initiating change for these minority groups.
5. Asian Americans and Native Americans have greatly improved their conditions in American society.

Issue Brief 1: Native Americans and Asian Americans

Native Americans and Asian Americans have faced a great deal of oppression throughout their history with the United States. Both races have faced economic hardship and difficulty integrating into the general society. Native American struggles with American society date back to the initial colonization and set-up of the United States' government. A turning point for this group, however, was the Indian New Deal instituted under Roosevelt. Asian Americans faced issues in America, first because they immigrated to America much later than the Europeans. A great deal of anti-Asian sentiment grew as their immigration increased at such a rapid rate. Thus the discrimination and oppression these races faced historically

greatly impacted their social integration into the United State's culture, and have shaped modern day conditions in which these minority groups live.

Native Americans have faced long-standing oppression from the United States Government. Presidents like Jackson promoted the Removal Act, which forced Native Americans to leave the US and relocate in territory west of the Mississippi River (*Native American Removal From Their Land*). The continued disregard for Native Americans' rights that have forced them to live on unsavory land has persisted. During the Red Power movement, Native Americans even occupied Alcatraz in protest to symbolize the unsavory "land" on which the United States government had deemed suitable for them lacked food, resources, and means to sustain their people (Smith). Additionally, Native Americans have faced employment discrimination, which further deters their true integration into American society and ambivalent relations with Americans(Academic Commons). These territorial and economic struggles have thus created a divide between Native and American culture. This divide has been the source of economic and social discourse.

A turning point for the Native Americans' oppressed situation came with the Indian New Deal under Roosevelt's administration. Harold Ickes and John Collier lead this New Deal, which aimed to "give tribes both legal and organizational capabilities to pursue economic development while maintaining their individual cultures"(*Minority Groups and the Great Depression*). This program essentially promoted the preservation of tribal culture and traditions and increased tribes' economic and political independence. The increased relations between the

government and Native Americans have greatly improved their economic conditions as this minority group works to secure the livelihood of their culture.

Asian Americans also faced oppression and difficulty with the American Government. Asian immigration in the mid to late 1800s “produced a tremendous influx immigrants and refugees from Asia”(*Minority Groups and the Great Depression*), which increased hostilities against Asian workers as they saturated the job market. Like Native Americans, they faced discrimination here and were forced into “roles as subservient cooks, servants or coolies, garment workers and prostitutes”(Academic Commons). Furthermore, the large number of Asian immigrants that entered the work force did so often at lower wages, which, consequently, decreased the job demand for native workers and their higher pay. This new labor dynamic sparked a great deal of anti-Asian sentiment that barred them from integration into American society.

Asians in America began to band together and bridge the barriers between their different nationalities and languages in the 1960s. At this point, many of them were American-born and were influenced by other Civil Rights movements, like the Black Power movement. The real success was seen as previous stigmas of “exclusion” and that “aliens [were] ineligible to citizenship”(*Minority Groups and the Great Depression*) changed. Furthermore, Asian Americans, in part benefiting from affirmative action, increased their educational level and economic success.

In review, both Native Americans and Asian Americans faced great oppression and discrimination in the early interactions with the U.S. government. Yet, both races seemed to establish a partial solution as Native Americans sought

independence and rights separate from the United States government, while Asian Americans increased their integration into American society. Though it is not to say they still do not face hardships as a racial group today, these minorities have come a long way from discrimination that initially oppressed their people.



Secretary Ickes and signs the Reform Act in 1935.

Asian Americans work the fields in California.



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